

The Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsaa): Orthographic and Scribal Features, Analysis, and Translation — Column 3

Description

The Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsaa):
Orthographic and Scribal Features, Analysis, and Translation — Column 3

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Abstract

This study presents a detailed philological, orthographic, and text-critical analysis of Column III (Isaiah 2:21–3:24) of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) from Qumran. The research focuses on the identification and classification of scribal features, including orthographic variation, corrections, additions, omissions, and spacing phenomena, alongside a diplomatic translation that preserves the structural and textual characteristics of the manuscript.

The analysis demonstrates that most textual differences between the Qumran scroll and the Masoretic Text can be attributed to systematic orthographic and scribal practices. However, their distribution suggests that orthography functions as an active component in the structuring of the textual profile rather than as a secondary or derivative layer. At the same time, certain variants may reflect alternative textual traditions within the pluriform textual landscape of the Second Temple period.

By integrating textual criticism, Hebrew linguistics, and manuscript analysis, this study contributes to a more refined understanding of scribal transmission and textual plurality in early biblical texts.

Keywords

Great Isaiah Scroll; 1QIsaa; Qumran; Dead Sea Scrolls; Isaiah; Column III; textual criticism; orthography; scribal practices; textual variation; Masoretic Text; Second Temple period; Hebrew linguistics; biblical philology; manuscript analysis

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

A seam is visible along the left margin of the column, one among many present throughout the scroll. In order to produce a scroll, the scribe had to stitch together individual pieces of leather. Each sheet of leather contained several written columns, in fact as many as could fit depending on the size of the material. Thus, each sheet typically bore approximately three to four columns of text. The Great Isaiah Scroll consists of seventeen leather sheets, each containing three or four columns. These seventeen sheets are connected by seams; one such seam is visible in this image along the left edge of the text.

This side (image) also displays the addition of certain letters at the ends of specific lines. These additions indicate that, due to re-stitching and the consequent damage to the ends of certain lines, the scribe supplemented the missing portions (individual letters or entire words). In this case, particular attention should be given to the letter *vav* added at the end of line 25.

This side (image) also contains gaps within the text, that is, spaces between certain words. These spaces can be observed in lines 1, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16, and 25. The space in line 1 marks the conclusion of Isaiah 2:21 and the beginning of Isaiah 2:22. Similarly, the space in line 6 marks the end of Isaiah 3:3 and the beginning of Isaiah 3:4. The space in line 10 separates Isaiah 3:6 and 3:7. The space in line 14 separates verses 9 and 10; that in line 15 separates verses 10 and 11; that in line 16 separates verses 11 and 12; and that in line 25 separates verses 17 and 18.

This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy in the Great Isaiah Scroll, as it corresponds to a much later division of biblical texts into verses. At the end of line 6, two dots are also present, the function of which remains unclear. This side (image) further contains corrections of certain incorrectly copied words. Such errors are marked by dots placed beneath each letter of the word. These corrections are observable in the fifth and sixth lines from the bottom. In the fifth line from the bottom, the text reads *YHWH*. This word is marked with dots beneath each letter, and below it the correction '*adonay*' has been added. In the sixth line from the bottom, the situation is reversed: '*adonay*' appears in the text, and it is corrected in the same manner to *YHWH*.

The space in the second line, marking a new paragraph, in fact indicates the conclusion of chapter two. The following line begins chapter three of the Book of Isaiah.

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SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF THE QUMRAN TEXT AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE QUMRAN AND MASORETIC TEXTS

Line 3: Sixth word: K = *mesiy*r (removes, takes away—Hifil verbal form, present singular). The form attested in K cannot be assigned to any recognized grammatical category and may therefore be regarded as an error.

Line 10: Third word: K includes *vav*, whereas this letter is absent in M.

Line 16: Sixth word: K = *negaso* (“his oppressor”), M = *nogsayw* (“their oppressors”). In K, the noun “children” is treated as singular, whereas in M it is treated as plural. Both usages may be considered grammatically acceptable in Hebrew in this context.

Line 17: First word: M = *me'ašreyha* (“your guides, those who lead you...”), K omits *alef* as the second consonant in this word. A hole in the parchment has damaged the final word in this line. According to M, it can be readily reconstructed, especially since the *vav* at the end of the word remains visible. The word in question is most likely *bile'u* (third person plural, past tense, from a verb meaning “to swallow,” “to disappear,” “to deviate,” or “to be lost”).

Line 18: Fourth word: K lacks *vav*, which is present in M.

Line 23: Final word: K = *be-ragleyhenah* (“in their feet,” “upon their feet”—preposition “in/on” + noun “foot” in plural with a third person feminine plural suffix). M = *be-ragleyhenah* with an added masculine plural suffix. The meaning remains identical; however, the K reading more closely aligns with the syntactic structure of the sentence. Since such variation is permissible in Hebrew, the M reading cannot be considered erroneous.

Line 26: First word: K records a form containing *sin*, whereas M presents the same word with *samekh*. According to established orthographic conventions, the M variant is likely correct. Third word: K includes the conjunction *vav*, whereas M does not.

Line 27: First word: K records a form with *resh*, which appears to be erroneous. The scribe may have intended to write *vav*, although this cannot be determined with certainty based on the shape of the letter. Third word: K includes *vav* as a conjunction, which is not the case in M.

Line 28: First word: K includes *vav* as a conjunction, whereas M does not. Between the final and penultimate words, K omits the word *mitpahot* (“scarves,” “coverings”), which is present in M.

Line 29: Final word: K = *we-yihyu* (“and they will be,” or “and they were”), whereas M = *we-hayah* (“and it will be”). The scribe employs a true future tense, whereas M uses a future form derived from the past with the addition of *vav* indicating sequential progression (*waw consecutivum*). This difference is not considered substantial.

Diplomatic Translation of Column III (Isaiah 2:21–3:24)

Column 3: Isaiah 2:21–3:24

(1) (*continuation of 2:21*) when He rises to terrify the earth. (22)
Cease relying on humankind, whose breath
(2) passes through the nostrils; for what is he, that you should depend on him? (PP)

(3) (*Chapter 3:1*) For behold, the Lord YHWH removes from Jerusalem and Judah
(4) both supply and support, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water, (2) the
mighty man and
(5) the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, (3) the captain of fifty, the
man of rank,
(6) the skilled craftsman and the enchanter. (4) And I will appoint youths as their leaders [+..+]
(7) and capricious children shall rule over them. (5) And the people shall oppress one another,
each against his neighbor;
(8) the youth shall be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable. (6) A man
shall seize his brother
(9) from the house of their father, saying: “You have a cloak; you shall be our ruler, and these
ruins
(10) shall be under your authority.” (7) [+and+] on that day he shall rise and say: “I will not be a
healer,
(11) for in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; do not make me a ruler of the people.” (8)
For Jerusalem has stumbled,
(12) and Judah has fallen; for their words and their deeds are against YHWH, provoking
(13) the eyes of His glory. (9) The expression of their faces testifies against them and declares
their sins, like the sins of Sodom.
(14) They do not conceal them. Woe to their soul, for they have brought evil upon themselves.
(10) Say of the righteous
(15) that it shall be well, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. (11) Woe to the wicked and
corrupt, for
(16) evil returns upon them as the recompense of their hands. (12) Foolish children oppress my
people, and women rule over them. O my people,
(17) your leaders lead you astray and [{swallow}] the paths by which you should walk. (PP)

(18) (13) YHWH rises to contend; He stands to judge the peoples. (14) YHWH enters into
judgment
(19) with the elders of His people and their princes: “You have devoured the vineyard, and what
belongs to the poor is in {&your&} houses.
(20) (15) What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the face of the poor?” says
{&the Lord&} YHWH
(21) of hosts. (PP)

(22) (16) And YHWH said: “Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, walking with
outstretched

(23) necks and wanton eyes, mincing as they go, making a tinkling
(24) with their feet, (17) therefore [..the Lord..] {&YHWH&} will strike with scabs the crowns
of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts.

(25) (18) And in that day [..YHWH..] {&Adonay&} will remove the finery of their ornaments—
anklets and headbands {&mem&},

(26) and crescents, and pendants and bracelets and veils,

(27) (20) and headdresses and ankle chains and [..the article stands here..] perfume boxes and
amulets,

(28) [+and+] rings and nose jewels, (22) [+and+] festal robes and mantles [m...mitpahoth...] and
purses,

(29) (23) and mirrors and linen garments and turbans and long veils. (24) And it shall be...

Conclusion

The analysis of Column III (Isaiah 2:21–3:24) of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) demonstrates that the textual profile of the manuscript is shaped by a consistent interplay of orthographic practices, scribal activity, and structural conventions. The physical features of the scroll—such as seams, corrections, additions, and spacing—confirm that the process of transmission was not merely mechanical but involved ongoing intervention, adjustment, and, at times, reconstruction of the text.

Most of the observed differences between the Qumran and Masoretic traditions can be attributed to orthographic variation and routine scribal behavior, including the addition or omission of consonants, morphological fluctuation, and the use of alternative graphic forms. However, these features do not function as random or secondary phenomena. Rather, their patterned distribution suggests that orthography participates actively in the structuring of the text, contributing to the formation of its internal coherence and readability.

At the same time, a limited number of variants—particularly those involving lexical choice, number agreement, or verbal forms—may point beyond orthographic variation and reflect alternative textual possibilities within the pluriform textual landscape of the Second Temple period. Such cases, although relatively rare, indicate that the textual tradition preserved in 1QIsaa cannot be reduced solely to scribal deviation from a fixed Vorlage but must be understood within a broader framework of textual fluidity and development.

The diplomatic translation presented alongside the analysis further illustrates the degree to which scribal and orthographic features are embedded within the textual fabric itself. By preserving these features, the translation makes visible the dynamic relationship between form and meaning, as well as the interpretive challenges inherent in working with early manuscript traditions.

Taken together, these observations support a model of textual transmission in which orthography, scribal practice, and textual variation operate not as isolated categories but as interconnected dimensions of a complex and evolving textual system.

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